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THE MOTHERS' COMPANION

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VOL. III

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"Trust me to take you safely over."

SALLIE'S BOY.

BY JESSIE M. E. SAXBY,

Author of "Dora Coyne," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"FOR WORDS, LIKE NATURE, HALF REVEAL."

THE Silver was babbling pleasantly as it meandered through the meadows of Wately. It had come a long way before it reached that level, quiet place, and it had a great deal to tell the forget-me-nots upon its banks about the Sna Fell, where it had its birth; about the rocks, over which it had bounded on its course down hill; about the trees, whose branches had kissed it as they leant lovingly to its breast; of the devious ways by which it had come.

"I assure you, darlings," said the Silver, "I am almost breathless from leaping falls and curving round boulders. I have scarcely strength left for putting a fringe of white around my stepping-stones."

"There are some folks will be pleased at that," laughed the forget-me-nots. "A pair of lovers came here not long ago—she timid, he strong. They had to cross the stream, but the girl was afraid to trust her small dainty feet to the slippery stones, until he said, 'The water is shallow here, and as still as can be. See, there is not a foam flake around the stepping-stones. Trust me to take you safely over.' She put her hand in his, and tripped lightly from step to step, looking at the water all the time, and saying, 'Yes, the Silver is quiet here!'"

"I thought," said the little river, "that all the young folks liked me best where I am strong and wild, and impetuous. I know that when I pass through the meadows of Wately, old men and women and infirm folk love to come to me, and are thankful for these stepping-stones, which help them across so nicely. But among the woods where my channel is deep, and up on the hillside where I take many forms and have many moods, lovers, and school-boys, and children prefer to find me. *They* say that the Silver does not look like the same stream when it reaches the meadows, and they love to cross my shining waves by leaping or wading."

"Yet," the forget-me-not sang, "*some* lovesome maidens and little children care to come by the meadows to pluck some of us, and pass over the Silver by those stepping-stones; and here come two of such creatures."

Yes. There came across the meadow a girl, holding by the hand a tiny boy, and they were talking softly as they moved on. The girl's head was bent towards the child, his face was raised to hers with that expression of utter trustfulness which is childhood's chief beauty. He was a fair, delicate boy, not over five years of age. The girl was near the end of her teens, tall and beautiful, "in the blossom of her days." There was blended with the wonder-look of maidenhood on her features a very sweet air of maternal fondness, which added greatly to her charm. When they reached the side of the stream she was saying, "It is really quite easy. I put my feet firmly down on the stones, and I don't look at the water, but just at the next stone I've got to reach; and so, on I go till I'm over the Silver."

The child surveyed the stepping-stones critically for a moment, and while he did so his sister stooped to gather a few forget-me-nots, but she did not let go his hand in so doing; then he said, "Sis, I don't think my feet are big enough."

"Small feet stand best on big stones, Benjie," she made answer; then in a tone of exceeding tenderness, because she noted a swift glance of fear in his eyes, the girl added, "but if you really can't walk across, my pet, I'll carry you. You won't be afraid of tumbling into the Silver if Sis carries you across?"

"I should think not," he answered, decisively.

The slim graceful figure bent down, and in a moment Benjie was clinging round his sister's neck, and her arms were twined closely about him. He shut his eyes, and laid his cheek on hers, and Sallie gave one little anxious look ahead, for she had never crossed so burdened before. It was not fear of wetting her boots which made the girl anxious. It was the confiding touch upon her face, his utter belief in her which caused her to think, "If I *were* to slip, by any chance, how Benjie's faith might be shaken."

Does it make you smile to be told that the girl said then within herself, "Please God, help me not to slip"? After that Sallie set one foot on the first stone, and, with a quick, steady motion, crossed the Silver quite safely. And while doing so she said to Benjie—

"Some day, when I am an old woman, and can't walk without help, you will be a big, strong man, pet; and then it will be your turn to carry me over the stones."

"Yes, that's what I'll do, Mam-lee; and I hope there may be a *great many* stones—large ones—and deep, deep water running fast, so that you may see how strong and brave I have grown. And you will shut your eyes and hold me so, while I carry you along. How funny it will be, and nice! I wish I was growed, Sis."

Sallie laughed and sighed; the laugh was evoked at the thought of her small brother ever becoming a tower of strength to her; the sigh rose from a tender heart, early burdened with care, and conscious that to be "growed up" was not always best. She was the eldest but one of a large family; the mother had died at Benjie's birth, and on Sally had fallen that mother's work. Thus the girl had habits of thought grave beyond her years; so, when the Silver was safely crossed and the couple were walking onwards to the village, she said—

"Do you know, Benjie, I thought, as I carried you, of a text in the Bible which just seemed to fit us, you and me; this is it: 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.' You see, if I carry you *now*, and you carry me by-and-by that will be doing the will of God, my pet. And by 'carrying,' I don't just mean lifting one up and bearing him across the Silver. I mean comforting each other in trouble, sympathising in everything, and—oh, my Benjie, I think you often carry Sis, even now."

The boy was very intelligent, and reflecting beyond his age, and therefore could respond to what she said. Looking up into her eyes, which had filled with tears, Ben answered—

"I know what you mean, Mam-lee, and I'll try hard to help you more. When Fairly is aggravating, or Clara says she *won't*, and you don't know what to do with them, I'll just *never* forget to come and kiss you. And when father's specimens can't be put straight all you try, I'll always remem-

ber not to want you for anything till you've quite done with them."

"You are the dearest, funniest specimen ever was," Sallie laughed, "and you know just what I mean. Yes, Benjie, you carry me even now."

"But not so much—not nearly so much—as you carry me, and I am quite determined, Sis, that when I am a big man it shall be different."

Did the girl dream then, that when her little brother was grown up, she should need *him* to bear her up? I am afraid not. The smile which curved her lips and shone from her soft eyes seemed to say that her thoughts were with someone "growed up" already, who would bear her burdens for her in the time to come; but she answered Benjie as he desired, and thus they chattered to one another till they reached the village.

On their return, as they neared the river, Ben suddenly exclaimed—

"Oh, there come Roy and Mr. Holmes. I wonder where they are going now."

Sallie could have told that their brother and his friend were coming for the express purpose of escorting her home, that Mr. Hubert Holmes had wiled Roy from the woods, in which his soul delighted, and brought him in that direction because Sallie must come that way on her return. But the girl made no comment, only her face flushed beautifully, and she stooped to gather some grasses from the meadow.

Roy Linton was two years older than his sister, but his friend was some years older than either, and they were in the habit of looking up to Hubert as a very superior person indeed.

Less partial friends had a good deal to say of young Holmes, which did not agree with Sallie and Roy's estimate of him. He had been a spoilt only child, and at his father's death became Squire of a goodly heritage. His position was one of responsibility and honour, his influence not small, his example of weight. He might have been a power for good in Wately; but Hubert was a selfish man, and though his selfishness had not yet shown itself in any offensive manner, it was instinctively felt; and, notwithstanding his careless good nature, no one thought of appealing to the young Squire when trouble came.

"There are your sister and Ben by the river," Holmes said, and Roy called out, "Wait till we come and help you across, Sis."

The two young fellows were soon over the river, and Roy picked up Benjie, saying as he did so, "Come, old boy, I'll carry you over. Holmes will look after *you*, Sallie."

"Mam-lee carries one best," quoth Ben, and he looked over Roy's shoulder to see Sallie put her hand in that of Holmes and let him lead her across the stepping stones.

"I wish," he whispered softly, "that I might help you always thus."

That was not the first time Hubert had spoken such words to her, and they fell like music on her hearing, though she shook her head.

As they strolled slowly towards the Lintons' home that afternoon, they passed the gates of Wately Manor, which was the Squire's home, and Sallie, glancing at the fine old house nestling among its ancient trees, could not help thinking how happy she would be if she were living there with Hubert; but the soft pressure of Ben's hand reminded her that she must not yield to such thoughts. Yet the girl sighed, for her lover's eyes were on her; and, as if he were reading her thoughts, he said at that moment, "my home is *nearly* perfect; is it not?"

CHAPTER II.

"BUT WHO SHALL SO FORECAST THE YEARS."

THE Lintons left Hubert at his own gate—but not before he had possessed himself of the forget-me-nots and grasses which Sallie had plucked as she came along; and his manner of doing so seemed to put a new and perplexing idea into Roy's head. He was very silent till they reached their own garden, then he said, "Take a turn round the tennis-courts with me, Sal. Ben, run into the house, like a good boy. I want to talk to Sis."

No sooner was Ben off than Roy said abruptly, "Isn't Holmes making love seriously to you, Sal?"

She blushed, but answered with sweet gravity, "Yes."

"But—good gracious. Why, Sal, old girl, what on the face of the earth shall *we* all do?"

Roy spoke as if he had received a blow, his voice shook, and his colour paled. He realized all at once that Hubert's *serious* love-making meant the desolation and dismemberment of his father's household, if Sallie were serious, too; and I think his sister realized at the same time, and for the first time, what terrible difficulties lay before her. She had shaken her head often; she had told Hubert to "bide a-wee;" she had expressly said to him that her first duty was to her father's household; but all the time she had vaguely hoped and believed that, sooner or later, every impediment would be cleared out of her way, and she should be Hubert's wife.

Now, as they spoke, the girl's thoughts ran at lightning speed from her father, engrossed in scientific pursuits, helpless as a child where the cares of life are concerned, to headstrong Fairly, always in scrapes from which none but Sis could extricate him. From Fairly to Clara, quite as aggravating as the lad, and even less amenable to reason than he. From Clara to Annie, whose love of dress and admiration was already causing the older sister grave anxiety. From Annie to poor blind Roger, utterly dependent on Sallie; and from Roger to Ben, her darling, to whom she stood in place of father and mother. Roy himself was the only one of the family who (she thought) might have easily got along without her; but his looks and words told her how much *he*, too, needed Sis.

When she spoke her words were petulant, and such as he had never heard his self-forgetful sister use before.

"It should'nt be only what you shall do. You might for once ask what will make *me* happiest?"

"That's true; we forget *your* pleasure too often, Sal," Roy answered in broken tones, "But, dear, do you—do you want *very* much to—to marry Holmes?"

"I love Hubert," said Sallie.

"He's not half good enough for you—not that I think Holmes is'nt a nice fellow. He is all that. I like him better than any other man I know, but he isn't good enough for our Sis. And—Sal, Sal, could you be as happy with him as with us? Could you be as much to him as you are to us?"

Roy put his arm round her waist and looked at her with eyes wet and trembling lips, so that she could not make answer.

The girl's heart was torn within her, for now it seemed she must make choice between love and duty. Various remarks which Hubert had lately made, led her to feel that he meant to press for a decided answer soon, that he would resent further dallying with his feelings, and it was possible she might lose her lover altogether if she refused any longer to become engaged to him. More than one

matronly friend had hinted to her that it was not every girl got such a chance, and that it was absurd to sacrifice her life to "those children." The old nurse was quite able to look after them with the help of the very efficient governess who had been in the family many years, and was more like an auntie than one of a hired, too often maligned, class.

Why should they not do well enough without Sallie? That was the question Sallie now asked herself. She had asked it many times before, but had never allowed herself to answer it except in one way—

"I cannot leave the auld folk yet;
We'd better bide a-wee."

That evening it seemed to her that the "bide a-wee" had come to an end, and another kind of reply must be forthcoming.

The truth was, she had allowed too many of her wishes to follow the master of the Manor inside his own gates; the Tempter had found her in her weak moment, and was not slow to pour the subtle poison of his selfish reasoning into her soul.

The brother and sister walked silently round the tennis-green for a few minutes, then Roy recovered his composure.

"You have been so good to us, Sal," he said, "that we too often forget your interests in our own. That is very wrong, and ungrateful, and"—

"Oh, hush, Roy. You hurt me when you speak so."

"Well, but," the brother resumed, "I want to know, does Holmes want you to—come to the Manor *now?* Couldn't it wait till Clara is older? She is such a stupid just now, and Annie is as giddy as a fly; but when they are older they will do better. I'd try to manage them after your plan. I daresay I could do some of the things you do for poor Roger and father; not for Fairly or Ben, or,—Oh, Sal, we shall all come to grief when you go to the Manor."

"What nonsense!" Sallie answered quickly, but in her heart she knew it was not nonsense.

There was a long pause again, then Roy said—

"Well! I suppose you'll want some one to help you talk father round, so you can depend upon me. We won't think any more of ourselves before you, Sal. And though I say again there is no man I know good enough for you, yet since you've elected to—to love someone, I'm glad it's Holmes."

"Thank you, Roy."

Just then a clamour of voices came from the house, and out rushed Clara, a hoydenish girl of sixteen, followed by Fairly, her senior by two years; both were shouting, "There's Sis. Oh, won't she open her eyes! Sis! Hi! You never heard such news in your life."

"Never heard such news" was a common expression on the lips of that extravagant couple, so that Sallie's equanimity was not at all disturbed by it.

"I wish you'd try to be a little less 'intense,' dear child," she said as her sister flew near and flung an arm impetuously where Roy's had been; but Clara paid no heed to the gentle admonition.

"Only think," she cried. "Aunt Julia, with all her cats and band-boxes, is coming to take up her abode with us. She arrives to-morrow, as she duly intimates in the letter father has just received."

"Oh," Fairly exclaimed, "you should see what a picture of despair the pater is. When he read the letter he just dropped it, and said, 'Really! This is appalling news! Children, where is Sallie?'"

"Gracious!" Roy exclaimed, and Sallie certainly did open her eyes and allow that there never was such news. She asked: "Does Aunt Julia say how long she means to stay?"

"How long?" Fairly echoed with a loud laugh, and Clara eagerly explained Aunt Julia's intentions.

"It's for always, my dear. She's coming for good—or bad, I should call it. She says she is tired of living alone, and thinks she should reside with her dear and only brother and his dear, motherless children, who will be her heirs! Oh, isn't it fine. Why, she will be taking the rule of the house from you, Sis. You are only 'a chit in her teens' in Aunt Julia's eyes, my dear. You will have to abdicate, and the Dragon will be Queen here."

"Not if I know it," said Fairly; and then added with a smile: "There will be an arming of Sallie's own brigade if The Dragon shows any desire to usurp our Queen's throne. But, come, Sal, let us go and help father to bear his affliction."

The young folks went indoors and found their father helplessly fluttering some sheets of botanical paper in his hands and looking bewilderedly around for Sallie. Annie was standing near him with Aunt Julia's letter in her hand and an ugly frown on her pretty face, as she explained its contents to Roger, who was the only one of the family who did not seem to share in the extreme consternation which Aunt Julia's intentions had created.

"Poor old Dragon," said Roger, "I daresay she loves us after all, and needed some one beside her."

"Poor old fiddlesticks!" quoth Fairly, "she's just coming to make mischief, and set us all by the ears. I know how it has always been when the Dragon has paid us a visit."

"I daresay," said Mr. Linton, slowly, 'that your aunt does not mean all she says; and—of course, Sallie will put things straight."

"Yes, Mam-lee will put all straight," chimed in the voice of Ben, who had joined the group, and understood very little of what was going on.

Roy looked at Sallie, and she was aware that he was doing so. A new sense of guilt kept her from returning her brother's glance. She merely said to her father that she hoped it would be all right, and that she believed Aunt Julia would soon tire of staying with them, and take herself off again.

"She is very peculiar, my dears," said Mr. Linton, "but she has had a sad history, and I should like my sister to feel at home here. You will try to bear with her. Sallie, you will talk to them, and show them how necessary it is that they bear with their aunt's foibles. Yes, my dear, *you* will smooth this matter. Also explain to nurse and Miss Thatcher; and—Sallie, I require those beetles to be removed into the oak cabinet. You'll see to it to-morrow, please."

He retired to his study, and his children grouped themselves around their elder sister, while she "talked" and "smoothed" regarding the Dragon, until the young people became more reconciled to receiving Aunt Julia as a member of the family.

When Sallie retired for the night the last thing she always did was to go to her dressing-room where Ben slept, and see that he was happily "folded" for the night. As she bent over her pet lamb that night he looked up—he had not gone to sleep as she expected—and said:

"Mam-lee, I've kept awake to tell you that maybe Aunt Julia isn't such a big burden as she looks, and I'm going to help you carry her."

(To be continued.)

Japanese Ladies in their National Dress.

THE NEW YEAR IN JAPAN.

In Japan two days contend for the privilege of commencing the new year. As is well known, the Government has adopted the Western Calendar, hence officials and the more progressive people celebrate the first of January; but, in the interior of the country, where fashions are not so easily changed, the old method of reckoning, which postpones the commencement of the year for a little over a month, is generally observed.

The closing days of the old year are a busy time. Merchants are seen hurrying about the city, carrying with them numerous bills and account books; for now is the last chance to collect any money that may be due. Any bills that are not collected now would be virtually outlawed after the year had expired; and for a person to fail to pay the money he is owing would be equivalent to bankruptcy.

To the children, far more interesting than the visits of the dunning merchant is the coming of the makers of *mochi* cakes; for, what turkey and mince-pies are to a New England Thanksgiving, that are these cakes to a Japanese New Year. Three men pass along the streets carrying a big iron kettle, a wooden apparatus for steaming rice, a stone mortar, one or more large wooden mallets, and a few other utensils. Coming to the place where their services are required, they soon have a good fire under the kettle; while in the steamer is placed a glutinous variety of rice, which for a day and a half previous has been soaked in water and then drained off in a basket.

After the process of steaming is completed, the rice is kneaded with the hands and then placed in the mortar, where one or two men pound it, while another, between the blows of the mallets, dexterously turns over the mass of dough. This is at last made up into round cakes, looking like lumps of unbaked bread. They are eaten in that condition or after being roasted. The use of *mochi* cakes is not confined to New Year's Day, for they are also used at weddings and on other festal occasions. At "house-raisings," such cakes are frequently thrown down from the roof to the crowd below. They also form a prominent offering at both Buddhist and Shinto shrines, a Buddhist proverb saying that, of the one hundred kinds of food suitable for offerings to the gods, *mochi* ranks first.

The last night of the year there is a ceremony more generally observed in former times than at present, and which has special interest because of its resemblance to the old Roman festival, *Lemuria*. On the Roman festival, which occurred in May, black beans were thrown over the head, with the repetition nine times of the words, "Begone, ye evil spectres of the house!" In Japan, beans are scattered around, with the words, "Begone, evil spirits! good luck, come in!" A peculiar variation of this sentence was used in Sanda, when the name of the *damio* signified nine devils. In order to avoid anything which might seem discourteous to him, the one who scattered the beans boldly exclaimed, "Evil spirits, come in! good luck, come in!"

The first day in the year is a general festival, celebrated by feastings and reunions. The young people have various games, which are considered especially appropriate to the occasion. On the first or second day, the children who have been taught penmanship prepare on slips of paper several inscriptions as samples of their handwriting. These are folded up, tied with red and gold cords, and placed among the decorations before the god-shelves. On the fifteenth day of the month, a fire having been built in the yard, the decorations are thrown into it; while the children eagerly watch to see whose paper will be carried by the draft highest up in the air, for its writer is thus assured of becoming a skilful penman.

On the second night of the year there is placed under the pillow, for the sake of promoting lucky dreams, a picture of the treasure ship. Sometimes the boat bears as its passengers the seven gods of wealth. At other times, it is represented laden with corals, pearls, and other treasures.

New Year's calls are as much of an institution in Japan as in any American city. They are not, however, confined to the first day of the year, but may occur any time within the first two weeks. The caller frequently carries with him a gift, which implies the desire of the donor to receive kindly services during the coming year. Persons who have not time for congratulatory visits send around their cards by a servant. Officials are very careful to call upon their superiors, and as this class of persons now affect the foreign style of dress, it is amusing to watch them on their rounds. There is a wide diversity in style—jackets, long coats, swallow-tail coats, bob-tail coats; cloth, velvet, and silk vests of all colours; gaudy neckties; white or lavender cotton gloves, several sizes too large for the wearer; and, above all, stove-pipe hats of every fashion that during the last fifty years has prevailed in western lands. Sometimes a number of persons, whose funds will not allow the purchase of a suit for cash, combine to buy one in common; and then the long or short, the thin or stout, take turns in displaying this finery to those on whom they call.—*Illustrated Christian Weekly.*

THE VEILED ANGEL.

(NEW YEAR LINES.)

A FLEECY cloud came drifting down the wakened sky,
When Christmas bells were pealing forth their minstrelsy,
And earth was glad, for time had brought again the morn
On which her Christ, her Hope, her Promised One was born.
Within the bosom of that heavenly cloud there lay
A messenger celestial, sent to earth that day
To reign a king in place of one whose parting knell
Was mingling with the echoes of the Christmas bell.
The angel of the cloudlet looked on earth, and said—
"I come to thee all stainless from the Hand which made
The universe, unrolls the years; and in His name
Thy highest aspirations, hopes, and deeds I claim;
But only claim *to keep for thee.* Then never fear
To meet the God-sent angel of a coming year.

JESSIE M. E. SAXBY.

THE SQUIRE'S LAST WALK.

BY M. M. POLLARD,

Author of "Under Suspicion," etc., etc.

A PLEASANT room in Oakdale Manor House; the table laid out for breakfast, and a bright fire in the grate, reflecting itself on the polished brass fire-dogs and fender. The only occupant of the room, Maggy Dennis, glances somewhat impatiently, for the third time, at a clock that is solemnly ticking on the mantel-piece.

"How long papa is to-day! Half-an-hour late, I declare," she repeats to herself; and then she goes to the window and reads over a letter, the contents of which are already stereotyped in her memory. Only a few lines, that run thus—

"Darling Maggy,—I have written asking your father to sanction our engagement; he will get the missive this morning. How I long to know his answer! Your loving Dick Churchill."

As she bends over the epistle, one can see Maggy is perhaps not exactly pretty; but she is simple, girlish, and slim, with very dark brown hair coiled in a roll at the back of her head, and good features.

But when, the letter finished, she looks up with a flush on her cheeks, a glow in her soft brown eyes, a quick, bright smile on her lips, the wonder is that any one would think of comparing mere beauty with the attractiveness that is so peculiarly her own.

Yonder is Dick's letter to her father. She knew his dashing, off-hand writing at once; and she has placed the important document under a pile of other letters beside the Squire's plate.

Her own share of correspondence has been rather large on this morning, for it is the day before Christmas; her friends have been mindful of her, and pretty cards and dainty gifts have come from one and another, with loving greetings for the happy season.

As Maggy stands at the window waiting for her father, her eyes rest on a fair scene. Heavy rain has fallen during the night, and a sudden, intensely sharp frost has turned the drops to crystal. Icicles of a thousand fantastic shapes hang from the tree-boughs, the hedges, and the quaint old sun-dial. The grass of the lawn is sprinkled with rain-drops that have been transformed by the frost to gems, and now the wintry sun, shining down from a cloudless sky, touches them with light and sparkle.

Beyond the sloping lawn lie pasture fields, farms, with their picturesque out-buildings, orchards, and out-houses, whilst on the softly-rounded hills in the distance stand two or three windmills, their giant arms in repose, all looking so distinct in the clear atmosphere that one might well compare the Kentish Wealds to some great, grand landscape garden.

Presently Squire Dennis comes hurrying into the room, looking not a little disturbed and flustered, as people are apt to look when they boast of punctuality and are caught napping. A large piece of black sticking-plaster is on his chin, and he turns his cheek to Maggy for his morning kiss.

"Kept you waiting, I'm afraid," he says, as he seats himself at the table. "Ring the bell, my dear, and let us have breakfast at once. I think that fellow Roger brought me my shaving-water direct from the pump this morning, it was so cold. I've cut my chin, you see. And, Maggy, when Ann goes to dust my bedroom tell her I have lost my ring—the one with your dear mother's hair in it."

"Oh, papa! let me run upstairs now and look for your ring."

"If you like, my dear; the coffee can wait till you return."

Maggy finds the ring lying on the floor near the table, and beside it is its blue morocco case overset. Wondering much that her father overlooked what was so visible, she brings the ring to him, placing it herself on his cold, red finger.

"Thank you; I feel lost without my ring. Strange I should miss it on this day—the anniversary of *her* death, two years ago."

"So it is, papa. How rapidly time passes!"

"The rapidity does not matter much to you, child; for you are yet in the very blossom-time of youth; but to old fellows like I am, it *does* matter. Each day as it passes seems to steal away a portion from the short season of life remaining to me. But I will not moralise now. What have you under that cover?"

"Poached eggs, on toast."

"I am tired of eggs on toast; what else is there?"

"Hot veal cutlets, and cold game pie."

"Cook does not give us much variety, I must say. I'll take some pie."

But the Squire soon pushes his plate away untasted, and sops himself some dry toast.

"My appetite flags somewhat to-day. I will look over my letters; perhaps they will give it a zest."

"I have such numbers of Christmas cards!" exclaims Maggy, nervously, as she sees her father take up Dick's epistle.

"Have you? No one would take the trouble to send *me* a card."

"I don't know that, papa; that big envelope looks exactly as if there was something nice inside it."

"Your Aunt Dorothy's writing, I see; but I should imagine she could find something better to do with her money than waste it on buying cards."

"Oh, papa! what could be better than sending good wishes and pretty artistic pictures suited to the season? I think it a delightful custom."

Her father has tossed aside Aunt Dorothy's envelope unopened, and is again looking at Dick's letter.

"Who can this be from? The writing seems familiar to me, and yet I cannot recollect whose it is."

Another moment, and the letter is spread before him, and with a heightened colour on his cheeks, he is mastering the contents.

"What is this? Dick Churchill! Do you know what he has written about, Maggy?"

"I think I do, papa." Her head has gone down lower over her plate, and her heart is throbbing so loudly that she thinks every beat must be plainly heard.

"He wants me to sanction his engagement with you! The fellow must be mad to put such nonsense into your head—you, who are a mere child, just out of the schoolroom."

"I am past nineteen, papa, and I have heard you say my mother was married before she was that age," replies Maggy, demurely.

"That may be, but times are altered now; the world has grown wiser. I suppose Master Dick Churchill thinks I am going to make a son-in-law of the first long-legged idiot that comes in the way."

Maggy cannot deny that Dick's legs are long, but that he should be called an "idiot" is more than she can stand; so she retorts somewhat emphatically—

"Dick is clever—*very* clever! everybody says so. He took high honours at college, and now he is offered a fine appointment in London—journalist to a new paper, I think it is; he is to write the political articles."

"Exactly; just what I expected! Fools always attempt to write what they know least about. Perhaps, like a cynical statesman I have heard of, he will try to prove that 'morals have no place in politics.'"

"Oh, I am sure Dick would never be so wicked, so untruthful, as to assert such a thing. I have often heard him say it is his firm opinion every man should honestly seek to blend the principles of righteousness with legislation—should care less about mere party spirit than about putting down what is wrong, and exalting all that is true, and right, and pure."

Squire Dennis looks at his little daughter as she stands before him, eager and animated, and does not think her quite so young now. He notices her lithe, graceful figure, set off to advantage by her neat blue-serge dress, her white collar and cuffs, and the bright buckle shining at her waist. Her soft brown eyes are eloquent and pleading. The demure consciousness of a child seems mingling with the earnestness of a loving, tender-hearted woman. He wonders he has never before observed how pretty and attractive she has grown. Perhaps that is because whatever her looks are, she is always the same to him—the best and dearest in the world. And now he is disturbed and irritated that another man has discovered her preciousness, and seeks to win her from him. What can he do without Maggy, the very light and sunshine of his house? His wife has been taken from him, and now his only daughter is wishing to go away. The sorrows of a lonely old age seem to gather suddenly about his heart. He cannot bear the weight as he thinks of the great desolate rooms, the deserted fireside, the home that will be no longer like home to him.

And so he speaks roughly, and harshly, until Maggy's brown eyes fill with tears, and her lip quivers as she puts her arm round his neck, and sobs she will never, *never* leave him.

"You will not give up your father for your lover, Maggy?"

"Papa, dearest, I never will. I did not think you would have cared so much."

The Squire dashes some suspicious moisture from his own eyes as he hugs his daughter close to him, and says—"Spoken like my own true Maggy. I thought you would not forsake me. Now let us forget all this nonsense, and say no more about it."

"You will write an answer to Dick, will you not, papa?"

"Never fear, I will give Master Churchill a bit of my mind, but not to-day—not to-day, Maggy. It is the anniversary of your poor mother's death, you know, and I cannot settle myself to writing," he adds, as he prepares to leave the room.

"Are you going to ride this morning?" asks Maggy, trying with a great effort to speak in her usual manner.

"No; the roads are slippery as glass, I expect, after the sudden frost. I shall first go round to the stables and tell the groom to get 'Lion' and 'Prince' rough-shod; then, most likely, I shall take a walk."

"You will be back by dinner-time, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear," replies the Squire, as he pauses once more to give his daughter a parting kiss.

"Poor child," he murmurs, as he notes her tear-stained cheeks. "Youth makes its own troubles, but they are not as irremediable as the troubles of age, after all."

When he is gone, his sister Dorothy's letter and two others lie unopened on the table; and wondering much at her father's neglect, Maggy puts the epistles away for him to read on his return.

"I suppose poor Dick's missive was a 'settler,' and he had no wish for further news," she says, with a sigh, as she prepares herself to be very busy. There are many duties awaiting her on this morning—parcels to be made up for old retainers on her father's estate, toys for the children, packets of tea and sugar for the aged; simple gifts, but each one conveying a message of the universal "good-will" that reigns supreme at this festive season.

But truth to say, her work is rather mechanically done, for her thoughts are wandering, and she often pauses to look out of the window at the ice-bound landscape, wondering whether time is always to be long, and life cruel; and how the latter will feel when Dick Churchill, her old friend and companion, who is now her lover, will have passed away altogether from her side. Her eyes often rest on a clump of trees in the distance, for she knows they form part of the vicarage shrubbery; and Dick is the Vicar's eldest son,

"The ice-bound landscape."

She is rather surprised he has not come over to Oakdale to hear what her father says to his proposal.

But hours slip away. Dinner-time is past. The meal has again and again been put back, until the cook is in a temper. Still the Squire does not return. Still Dick never

puts in an appearance. At last the great iron gate opens, and shuts with a clang. She sees a tall, broad-shouldered man walking up the avenue, and in an instant she has flung

"A quiet wedding at the village church."

a woollen shawl over her head and gone out to meet him.

Mr. Churchill is startled at her pale cheeks, her red eyes, her grave countenance—so unlike his usually bright, merry little Maggy.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! I have dreadful news to tell you," she exclaims, leading the way to a side path, where a high laurel hedge hides them from passers-by.

"Papa was very angry about your letter. It came on a most unfortunate day, when he seemed altogether vexed and out of sorts, so that made it worse."

"What did he say, darling?"

"All sorts of uncomfortable things; and I have promised never, never to leave him."

"But even your father cannot hinder us from loving each other, and being true to each other."

"No, that he cannot; and I am sure nothing would ever take the love for you out of my heart," she says, solemnly.

"Then we must not despair, but have patience, Maggy, and you must not distress yourself so much. Of course, our plans for the future are all upset now, but we will hope for the best, and keep our pledged faith and troth unbroken."

It is easy to listen to Dick, and to talk to him when he holds her to him and looks down into her eyes so tenderly, giving her hints for her help and guidance. Presently he asks—

"Do you think I may expect an answer to my letter?"

"I am sure papa will write to you; he said so; but perhaps you will not like what he writes. Has he been at the vicarage to-day? I thought he might have gone to talk to your father about us."

"He has not called to-day, I am certain, for I have been indoors all the morning."

"Then where can he be?" asks Maggy, starting suddenly away from Dick's side. "Dinner has been waiting a long time, and it makes me uneasy, for he said he would come back early."

"Perhaps he has called at Captain Vigo's, and been persuaded to stop there to dinner."

Maggy shakes her head doubtfully.

"That would be very unlike papa."

"I will call at Vigo's and inquire, if you wish. Of course you shall know as soon as I find out about him."

Maggie Dennis returns to the house, over the crackling

grass of the lawn, with head downcast, and heart full of conflicting hopes and fears—hopes that with one to love her so tenderly, so faithfully, as Dick does, all may yet come right some day, and fears which rapidly increase, caused by her father's long absence from home.

Mr. Churchill takes a short way to Captain Vigo's house, which is situated about a mile from Oakdale Manor. He crosses the corner of a wood, through which a merry little stream flows. Although its banks are frozen, and long icicles hang from the tree boughs over it, the rivulet trickles along with its own low rippling music. And near it, lying on some long rank grass, is an object that makes Mr. Churchill's heart stand still, for he sees at a glance it is Squire Dennis, his stick a short distance from him, his head at a most uncomfortable angle on some rough stones.

"He is dead!" is his first thought, as he goes towards the Squire, for his eyes are closed, his form motionless.

But a quick examination proves he is still breathing, and whilst Dick is considering what it is best to do, the Squire opens his eyes slowly and sees the shapely shoulders bent over him, the honest face grave with anxiety, the kind grey-blue eyes full of tender sympathy.

"Dick! is that you? How did I come here, I wonder? Ah, I recollect now. I have had a fall, and I think my side is hurt."

He tries to move, to rise up, but sinks back again helplessly, and Dick's strong young arms are round him in a moment.

"Let me help you, sir; you have got into an awkward position—lost your balance, and cannot right yourself."

He lifts the old man in his arms; for the Squire is weak and slight, whilst Dick Churchill has the physical power and muscles of a young Hercules; and it is well such is the case, for he has to put out all his strength to keep the Squire on his feet, as he totters along, feebly and halting, beside him.

The Squire is put to bed, and when Doctor Wills, the family physician, arrives, he looks grave, talks not of the fall as causing his illness, but of the "attack" that caused the fall.

"It must have been coming on for some time," he says, when, with professional experience, he has made a diagnosis of the case, and he plainly tells Maggy there is cause for anxiety.

So a shadow of grief falls over the household, and the poor little daughter, pale and shivering with dread, never leaves the bed-side, until late in the evening a message is brought her that Mr. Churchill has called to hear how the Squire is getting on.

Maggy runs down to the breakfast-room, that is dimly lighted with a single candle, and there she finds him waiting.

"Oh, Dick! papa is so ill; the doctor is with him now, and says there is no change. He thinks the attack was coming on for some time, and I am sure the symptoms he speaks of were just what puzzled me this morning.

"You must keep up your courage, Maggy."

"Yes, so Aunt Dorothy tells me. Is it not good of her to leave her husband and her six boys and girls to come over to stay here and help nurse papa?"

"Very kind of her, and I am glad of it for your sake, as it will spare you some fatigue, my own darling!"

"Dick, you must not call me that. I am not your 'own darling' any more," she says, looking up at him with troubled, wistful eyes.

"Are you not? Then you shall be my 'own dearest friend.' Will that do?"

"I suppose so," she answers, doubtfully.

"May God's love and peace be with you, dear Maggy, and give you support in your trouble," whispers Dick as he bids her adieu.

Squire Dennis does not die, after all. As the spring comes on, his mental faculties resume their usual vigour, but strength does not return in equal proportion to his bodily frame. It becomes plain to them all that he will always be a confirmed invalid, that his rides and drives are over, and that his last walk was that dreary pilgrimage from the Burton woods, after his fall.

One spring morning, when his chair has been placed near the window, so that the sunshine falls pleasantly on him, his eyes fall thoughtfully on Maggy, who is sitting opposite him busily employed with her knitting.

The Squire has had much time for thought during his illness. His views of things have altered. Selfishness and worldliness have been judged at their true estimate, and he can say, with all humility, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes."

"Maggy!"

She is over by him in an instant, and has seated herself on his footstool, leaning her chin on her hand, and looking up into his face.

"Do you want me, papa?"

"I have never answered Dick Churchill's letter, but I will do so now."

Maggy is so surprised that her cheeks flush crimson, and she does not know how to reply.

"Is he still in London?"

"Dick was coming to the Vicarage to spend Easter; perhaps he is staying there now."

"Dear child!" He strokes her dark hair thoughtfully for a moment, then says, "Bring me my desk—now for pen, ink, and paper."

"Can you really write, papa? Is your hand steady enough?"

"I will try. Dick was so good in getting me safe home from the wood that day that he deserves the first specimen of my caligraphy."

Had Maggy looked over her father's shoulder, she would have read in most extraordinary writing—for his fingers were still nearly powerless—the following words:—

"DEAR DICK,—You wrote me a letter once which I did not answer. Now my reply is, that if you are still in the same mind, you had better come and ask Maggy if she is in the same mind also. I shall raise no further objection."

Dick does not disdain the invitation. He sets out for the Manor House as soon as the letter reaches him, and Maggy, happy and radiant as of old, does not reprove him when again he calls her "his own darling."

The Squire wishes the marriage to take place without delay, for he argues, "Maggy has waited long enough, and I want Dick to take a son's place now I am set aside and cannot see after things. The whole estate will run to rack and ruin unless he takes the reins of management in his hands, and it will be better than journalism for him."

Soon afterwards there is a quiet wedding at the village church. Dick's father officiates, and as the Squire cannot be present, Aunt Dorothy gives the white-robed, happy little bride away.

Though always an invalid, Squire Dennis lived for some time longer, and then his closing days were calm as the sunset of a summer day. And he had the happiness of seeing grandchildren clustering round his knees; and the heir of the house—his especial favourite, a blue-eyed, noble little fellow—was called "Dennis" after him.

SIMPLE SWEETS FOR DINNER OR SUPPER.

THE approach of Christmas, so suggestive, among other thoughts, of pleasant gatherings, of children home for the holidays, and of other additions to our usual numbers, makes us turn over in our minds the question of extra dishes; and in view of such festive reunions a few suitable dishes are here given.

MENU.

Cup puddings; Raspberry fingers; Strawberry soufflé; Orange fritters; Jellies; Preserved pears; Jaune mange; Shape of ground rice; Cornflour cakes.

Cup Puddings.

Materials.—¼ lb. lump sugar; ¼ lb. fine flour; 3 ozs. butter; 2 eggs.

Directions.—Warm the butter, beat it to a cream with a wooden spoon; powder the sugar, and sift it in gradually, beating all the time; add the yolks of the eggs, and then the whites, beaten stiffly; last of all sift in the flour slowly through a dredger. Bake immediately in buttered cups, three parts full, in a moderate oven.

This quantity suffices for six cups. They may be made in the morning, and warmed up again. Success depends on observing the right succession, adding each ingredient slowly, and beating all the time.

Raspberry Fingers.

Materials.—½ lb. flour; 2 ozs. butter; 2 ozs. lard or dripping; a little raspberry jam; a pinch of salt.

Directions.—Put the flour in a basin, add the salt, rub in the butter and lard lightly with the tips of your fingers, till the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs; make it into a paste, with as little cold water as possible; roll it out once, cut it into fingers of equal length, put two fingers together with a little jam between each, and bake at once in a quick oven.

Care must be taken not to put the jam too near the edge of the pastry. These fingers will look better if brushed over with a little milk mixed with beaten yolk of egg, when nearly cooked.

Strawberry Souffle.

Materials.—3 eggs; ½ pint of milk; 1 oz. lump sugar; 1 teaspoonful castor sugar; 3 tablespoonfuls strawberry jam; rind of ¼ lemon; a few pieces of sliced sponge cake.

Directions.—Lay the sponge cake at the bottom of a buttered pie-dish. Separate the yolks of the eggs from the whites. Boil the milk with the lump sugar and lemon peel. Take out the peel, and pour the boiling milk very slowly on to the yolks of the eggs, stirring all the time, return it to the fire, and cook it carefully till it thickens. Spread the jam over the sponge cakes; pour the custard over this, and leave it to cool. Beat up the whites of the eggs to a stiff froth, and when the custard is cool, pile them neatly on top of it, and sprinkle the castor sugar over all. Set it in a cool oven till the whites are just tinged with colour, and serve cold. Cherry jam is a good substitute for strawberry.

Orange Fritters.

Materials.—¼ lb. flour; 1 tablespoonful salad oil; 2 eggs; 1 dessert-spoonful castor sugar, and about 1 tablespoonful of tepid water; 3 oranges.

Directions.—Make a batter with the flour, oil, water, sugar, and the yolk of one of the eggs. Beat well, and last of all, stir in the two whites, beaten stiffly. Have the oranges ready, peeled and quartered, dip them into the batter, coat them thoroughly, and fry in plenty of hot fat.

These may be served cold, but are nicer hot; care must be taken not to break the skin of the oranges, or the juice will spoil the batter; the pips must be left in.

Jellies.

Materials.—1 pint packet of the "Chelsea Table Jellies"; nearly a pint of tepid water.

Directions.—Make up the jelly with the water, according to directions given on the packet, and leave it in a cool place to set.

Preserved Pears.

Materials.—Some cooking pears, loaf sugar, two or three lemons, and some cloves.

Directions.—Peel, core, and quarter the pears; weigh them, and to every pound of fruit allow 1 lb. loaf sugar. Put two cloves into each piece of pear. Put a layer of the sugar (crushed) into a deep vessel, then put in the rest of the sugar and the pears in alternate layers; cover the vessel, put a weight on the top, and leave it till next day. Then add the juice and rind of a lemon to every pound of pears, and boil till the syrup is quite clear; this will take at least two hours.

This makes a pretty supper dish, especially if a very little cochineal is added to the syrup to improve the colour.

Jaune Mange.

Materials.—1 oz. gelatine; ¾ pint of water; yolks of 4 eggs; juice of 1½ lemons; rind of ½ lemon; sugar to taste.

Soak the gelatine in the water for ¼ hour. Add the other ingredients, put everything into a saucepan on the fire; stir it till it is just about to boil, strain it, put it into a mould, and leave it till cold.

Great care must be taken not to curdle the eggs.

Shape of Ground Rice.

Materials.—1 quart milk; 5 ozs. ground rice; 1 oz. lump sugar; the rind of ½ lemon.

Directions.—Mix the rice to a smooth paste, with a little of the milk (cold). Put the rest of the milk on to boil with the sugar and lemon-peel. When it is boiling, remove the peel, and pour the hot milk on to the rice, stirring all the time. Return all to the saucepan, boil five minutes, and put into a wet mould.

This may be made into a prettier dish by tinging to a light pink with cochineal; or half the mould may be filled with the mixture thus tinged, and the rest added plain.

Cornflour Cakes.

Materials.—8 ozs. cornflour; ¼ teaspoonful baking-powder; 6 ozs. castor sugar; 2 ozs. flour; 3 eggs; 2 ozs. butter; a little milk.

Directions.—Beat the eggs separately; cream the butter, beat all well together, and bake in well-greased patty tins till they are a light brown colour, and dry underneath; *i.e.*, about ¼ hour in a quick oven.

A. G. Whitty.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE POST OFFICE.

BY MRS. HENRY FAWCETT.

Most people are aware that one important branch of Civil Service employment, namely, that in the General Post Office, is open to women, but very few people know how large a number of women are thus earning their living, and will be surprised to hear that the total number in the United Kingdom, if those in unestablished, as well as in established positions, are added together, amounts to more than 22,000. Of these more than 7,000 hold "established positions," in the direct employment of the Postmaster-General.

The most important departments of Post Office work in which women are employed as clerks are the Savings Bank, the Receiver and Accountant-General's office, and the Postal Order branch; 750 women are thus employed. The only means of obtaining these appointments is through success in the competitive examinations, held from time to time by the Civil Service Commissioners. Candidates must be over eighteen and under twenty years of age; they must be unmarried, and are required to furnish satisfactory references as to health and character. The initial salary of a second-class female clerk is £65 a year, rising by £3 a year to £80. The first-class female clerks receive a higher rate of remuneration, but to pass from the second to the first-class depends not only on the length of service but on the merit and ability displayed in the work. There are also a few superior appointments, carrying a maximum salary of £300 a year.

Reading from printed slip.

It will be easily understood that the competition for female clerkships in the Post Office is very keen. Sometimes there have been as many as 2,500 applicants for 145 places. Any parents who are looking forward to work of this kind for their daughters would therefore do well to pay special attention to the kind of educational training required. The subjects of the examination are arithmetic, English composition, geography, and English history; the most important of these is generally understood to be arithmetic; neat hand writing and correct spelling are also essential. All particulars with regard to the date, place, and subjects of the examinations can be obtained from the Secretary of the Civil Service Commissioners, Cannon Row, Westminster; and a number of useful hints, with specimen examination papers and information of every kind bearing on the examinations are contained in a little shilling book which is published by Messrs. Cassell and Co., called "A Guide to Female Employment in Government Offices."

Key sending on Morse sounder.

Receiving telegraphic message by single needle and writer.

The female clerkships in the General Post Office were, in the first instance, confined to "daughters of gentlemen." But Mr. Fawcett, very soon after he became Postmaster-General, did away with this limitation, and at the same time caused the educational test of the examination to be made more stringent. He was convinced that the status of women in the service could be greatly benefited by raising the intellectual qualifications for entrance into it, and by abolishing the rather whimsical qualification of gentility. The phrase, "daughters of gentlemen," had acquired a purely conventional meaning, and had come to denote the daughters of professional men. The initial salary of the female clerks at that time was only £40 a year; and if daughters of professional men were found seeking this employment, it was to be feared that they and their parents were probably deficient in some of those qualities which are essential to industrial or professional success. The object of all those who wish women to obtain and hold a good position in the Civil Service should be to make these appointments tempting to bright, clever, well-educated young women, who would regard them as a rise in life rather than the reverse; certainly they should never be regarded as a sort of refuge for decayed gentlewomen.

It must not, however, be thought that this was the case even when the nominations were limited in the manner described. Before the appointments were thrown open to the public a sort of limited competition prevailed, three "daughters of gentlemen" being told off to compete for every vacant post. By this means the average of intelligence and fitness for the work was fairly kept up; but there is no

doubt that these have risen to a higher level since the limitation was abolished and the severity of the examination increased.

The success of the women in doing their work well, and in gaining the approbation of their official superiors, has been most marked. They do the same amount of work at the same rate per hour as the male clerks engaged in the same department. The book-keeping and other arithmetical work is performed by them with great skill and perfection. Not long ago an anonymous writer, in a paper which was sent to me, attacked the female clerks for their want of arithmetical accuracy. In the opinion of the writer it was impossible for the average female mind thoroughly to master figures. "Young women," he said, "have a nervous dread of anything pertaining to calculations, which no amount of practice eradicates." He also stated that the female clerks required much more supervision than the men. I sent these observations to a high official in the General Post Office, and asked for the unvarnished facts. The reply I received was, "The female clerks have shown themselves specially adapted for figure work, performing this class of work both accurately and neatly, and without the slightest appearance of 'nervous dread,' or lack of energy and grasp." With regard to superintendence I was supplied with the following facts:—In the female branch of the Savings Bank there are ten superintending officers over 260 clerks, or one superintendent to every twenty-six clerks. In the men's branch of the same department there are 600 ordinary clerkships and fifty-five superior appointments, or one superintendent over every eleven clerks.

Receiving by Morse writer.

The days are gone by when it was supposed to be a law of nature that women were incapable of arithmetic. The examiners of the schools belonging to the Girls' Public Day School Company reported this year that the average of the arithmetic was now as high as in the best boys' schools. One examiner, who had not examined girls in arithmetic for more than ten years, could not help expressing his astonishment and delight at the improvement that had taken place. There will always be some people whose figures, like Dora's, will never add up; but these do not all belong to one sex. I heard the other day of a young man who was firmly convinced that 27s. a week was £500 a year, and so rooted was his conviction on this subject that he wanted to marry on the strength of it.

Besides the employment offered to women of good education as clerks in the Post Office, there is a very large demand for female labour in the lower ranks of the service. Since the taking over by the Government of the telegraph service, a very large number of women have been employed by the General Post Office as telegraphists; there are also a large number employed as counter-women and sorters; the total number of women comprised in these three branches of employment in the permanent establishment of the Department being more than 3,000. The women thus employed belong either to the lower middle class, or to the higher ranks of the artisan class. The telegraphists and sorters have to submit to the inevitable examination, the conditions of which can be learned from the same sources as those given above for the female clerks. To become a "telegraph learner" a girl must have passed the prescribed examination

Sending and receiving by single needle.

Punching Wheatstone paper

sometime between the ages of 14 and 18. She is then passed on to the Post Office Telegraph School, where she obtains, free of charge, the instruction she requires in the management of the telegraph instruments; she receives no payment while she is in the school, where the course of instruction generally lasts about three months. If, at the end of that time, she has evinced no aptitude for learning telegraphy, her probationary appointment is cancelled, and she has to find some other employment. If, however, as is generally the case, she succeeds in satisfying her instructors that she has in her the making of a good telegraphist, she receives a certificate from the school, and is put in charge of one of the simpler instruments, and becomes a second-class female telegraphist. The scale of payment in this class begins at 10s. a week, rising by gradually progressive steps to 27s. a week; the rate of wages in the first-class begins at 28s. a week, and rises by annual increments of 1s. 6d. a week to 34s. There are in this branch of the work also a few superior appointments for women, dependent on character and ability, carrying salaries ranging from £110 to £250 a year. In this, as in the other branches of employment for women in the General Post Office, only single women are employed; all clerks, telegraphists, and sorters have to resign their appointments on marriage.

One of the appointments for which women have always been eligible is that of postmistress; between one and two hundred women are thus employed in the three kingdoms. Before the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882, a postmistress was always required to resign her appointment on marriage, and her place was usually transferred to her husband; the reason of this was to be found in the then legal incapacity of a married woman to own property; this prevented her from giving to the Postmaster General the necessary guarantees for the safety of the stamps and cash with which she was intrusted. The practical results of this state of things were often inconvenient. The wife very generally went on doing the work, while the husband received the pay and was responsible to the Department. More than one instance was known of a husband in this position absconding, thus leaving the Department and his wife in equally unsatisfactory positions. She, who had been doing the Post Office work all along, had no recognised position whatever and no claim for any salary. The Department at the same time was obliged to choose between punishing the innocent for the fault of the guilty, by taking the office away from the deserted woman; or, if it left the postmistress-ship in her hands, she having no legal control over any property in her charge as against her husband, the great risk had to be run of leaving the office practically in the power of a man who had proved himself to be a scamp, and might at any time return and clear off everything he could lay his hands upon. The absurdities and evils of this state of things were brought to an end by the Act relieving married women of their proprietary incapacities, and as a logical consequence of this Act, Mr. Fawcett abolished the regulation which up to that time had compelled postmistresses to resign their appointments on marriage. By this alteration of the rules the real and nominal responsibility were united, and the good old principle was adhered to, that whoever did the work should receive the wages.

It is unnecessary to point out the many advantages of Government employment. It is certain; there are no "out of work" times, and no slack times on half pay; medical attendance is provided gratuitously, and very liberal arrangements are made with regard to salary to those who are temporarily absent through illness. The claim to pension after long years of service is another advantage belonging to "established" positions under the Government.

In these days, when so much is heard of the want of employment for women, and of the wretchedly low wages paid to women in many trades, every effort should be made to point out the success both to themselves and the public which has followed from their employment in the Post Office, with a view to encouraging the opening to them of other branches of the Civil Service. In the United States of America large numbers of women are employed as clerks in the Treasury and other Government Departments, and the results of their employment have been as satisfactory there as in the English Post Office. Mr. George Pellew, a member of the Massachusetts bar, stated not long ago, as a proof of the special fitness of women for positions of trust, that of the large number employed in the United States, in the Treasury and other Departments, not one had ever been found guilty of embezzlement. We may hope that the many advantages derived from employing women in Government Offices will, in time, lead to the opening of other branches of the Civil Service to them.

WINTER EXERCISE FOR GIRLS.

BY MRS. ATKINS, M.D.

How to provide their daughters with a sufficiency of exercise during the winter without making their lives a burden to them, is a problem which the majority of English mothers seem unable to solve. Some give it up in despair, merely uttering an occasional feeble protest as day after day the girls sit round the fire declaring it is much too gloomy, or too cold, or too damp to venture out. Others, arousing themselves to a sense of their duty, insist on their daughters taking a constitutional each day, irrespective of weather, and the unfortunate girls are driven out for a specified time to dabble in the wet or face an east wind, to the very great detriment of their temper and with very problematical benefit to their health. In either case the results are the same—headache, indigestion, sluggish liver, ennui, and bad temper, followed as surely "as the night the day" by doctors' visits and doctors' bills.

The boys return from their football or bicycling hot, and dirty, and hungry, and rejoicing. No indigestion or headache there; no curved spines or aching backs. The blood has been coursing merrily through their veins, their muscles have all been exercised, their lungs have been filled with fresh air. They are healthy and—like all young animals—being healthy, they are happy.

Is it, then, impracticable for our girls to partake of the pleasures and health so lavishly heaped upon our boys? Can they not be helped to extract happiness and health even from our gloomy winters? Football is, of course, at all times inadmissible, and in really wet weather the same may be said of most out-door amusements. Some form of indoor exercise must then be provided for the many pouring days our dear old England favours us with. Battledore and shuttlecock have been suggested, and are occasionally practised; but it requires a large and tolerably empty room, or the damage to pictures and bric-à-brac may be considerable. Besides which, the lasses who are approaching young ladyhood are great sticklers for their dignity, and to their minds it is somewhat *infra dig* to take a battledore in hand, as it savours of childishness. Fencing, on the contrary, is anything but

childish, and if only, as seems probable, it becomes fashionable, many girls will take it up with enthusiasm.

Sir Everard Home, the well-known surgeon, speaking of fencing, says:

"Of all the different modes in which the body can be exercised, there is none, in my judgment, that is capable of giving strength and velocity, as well as precision, to the action of all the voluntary muscles of the body in an equal degree with the practice of fencing, and none more conducive to bodily health."

The best exercise is that which brings the greatest number of muscles into play at the same time; for, as physiology teaches us, "the frequently-renewed exercise of muscle, by producing a determination of blood towards them, occasions an increase in their nutrition, so that a large amount of new tissue is developed, and the muscles augment in size and vigour. The formative activity of muscles is so clearly dependent upon the active exercise of their functional powers that atrophy or wasting away is certain to supervene if this be interrupted" (Carpenter).

To this atrophy or wasting away of muscles is due, in a large proportion of cases, the curvature of the spine we so frequently meet with in girls. Quain, the anatomist, tells us that "the greater part of the erector muscles of the spine bends backwards the vertebral column and trunk, and co-operates powerfully in almost every great muscular effort of the body or limbs."

The majority of our girls certainly never make any "great muscular effort," and the consequence is a diminution in strength of the spinal muscles, rendering them unable to support the vertebral column, and the next step, curvature of the spine, is merely a question of time.

In fencing, the erectors of the spine are brought prominently into play, by which the already-mentioned increase of nutrition and augmentation in size are brought about, thus enabling the muscles to keep the spine erect without any assistance from corsets, irons, or other instruments of torture.

In fencing, again, a great expansion of the thorax takes place, whereby narrow chests are widened, stooping shoulders straightened, lungs more fully dilated, and the dangers of consumption greatly lessened.

Moreover, the blood courses through the whole body with great rapidity, removing all effete matter through the excretory organs, cleansing the liver of all "perilous stuff," and so greatly re-vivifying the brain that all melancholy thoughts and evil tempers engendered by a dismal, foggy December day take unto themselves wings and fly away.

It is not only as regards actual bodily health that fencing is to be recommended. It inculcates quickness of eye, judgment, and that "give-and-take," as schoolboys term it, which is really a form of self-control, and which few women ever master. As. Dr. Babington well expresses it, "I am of opinion that, in addition to the amusement which this exercise (fencing) affords, it is particularly calculated to excite in young persons a greater degree of energy and circumspection than they might otherwise possess; and it is obvious that, in respect of health, that mode of exertion is *superior to all others*, which, while it gives motion and activity to every part of the body, produces at the same time corresponding interest in the mind."

In addition to the already-mentioned advantages, fencing engenders a suppleness of muscle which produces a graceful carriage of the whole body. The girl who fences well will also walk well, even down a crowded room, instead of shuffling or stiffening in the manner usually seen.

In order to fence well all the muscles must be perfectly free; corsets, tight-fitting dress, and high-heeled shoes must be entirely tabooed, and some form of gymnasium dress (many of which are charmingly pretty) be adopted.

Two advantages has fencing over gymnastics: The first, that no special building is required, as a clear space in the centre of any moderate-sized room will suffice; the second that there is no danger of strain or fall, and, by wearing mask, jacket, and glove, no risk of any kind is incurred. The cost of these and the foils is also a mere trifle compared with building or even attending a gymnasium. A few fencing lessons might be taken by one member of the family, who could in her turn teach the others. Or fencing could be learnt, sufficiently for the purpose, from one of the many small books published on the subject.

As to the disadvantages of fencing, they are those of all indoor amusements—want of sunshine and fresh air. But the sunshine is often unattainable even out of doors, and the fresh air can be admitted through an open window when the fencers have sufficiently warmed not to feel chilly.

We will conclude our panegyric on fencing in the words of John Milton, who was himself an eminently skilful fencer:—

"This will keep them healthy, nimble, strong, and well in breath; is also the likeliest means to make them grow large and tall, and to inspire them with a gallant and fearless courage, which, being tempered with seasonable lectures and precepts to them of true fortitude and patience, will turn into a native and heroic valour, and make them hate the cowardice of doing wrong."

DRESS AND DRESSMAKING.

JANUARY is so often a rainy or a snowy month that it is just as well to be protected against it, and to reserve one's oldest gowns, so long as they are warm and whole, for wearing out-of-doors under an ulster or a wrap cloak, such as we here give an illustration of. It combines the advantges of being closely fastened down the front, and having sleeves as well, as a sort of extra protection for the arms, which are kept from flapping about by a somewhat heavy trimming at the end. This can be very easily made at home, and is quite a stylish looking cloak for those who only invest in one out-door winter garment. The striped stuffs made by some of the firms in the North of England that send out patterns of materials that can be bought by the yard, are capital for such cloaks as these, and there are some in dark blue and brown, and in two shades of grey, with what used to be called a shawl or pine pattern all over, that are very nice. In fact in the very best London shops the two latter are the cloths used for cloaks lined according as the purchaser prefers either with fur or domette, and quilted satin.

With regard to trimmings, both for dresses and cloaks, and jackets, a great deal of braiding is used, especially in black on coloured ground. It is not, however, done on the material when cut out, but on straight or shaped bands which are afterwards stitched into their places. There is much advantage in this, especially for amateur dressmakers. The sleeve, drapery, etc., does not get the first bloom taken off it, nor is it crumpled while the ornamentation is going on, and the panels, revers, collars and cuffs are very easily handled and turned about while separate from the dress. All who have ever done any braiding will understand the convenience of this.

Jet, for once, is very little used, and since it adds weight without warmth, it is undesirable, for the beads, even in expensive trimmings, are very insecurely fastened, and mounted on cotton and jute instead of on silk; they are always coming off, and are most unsatisfactory.

The trimming most used for jackets, cloaks, etc., is feather trimming, which has the same effect as fur, and is less heavy. The only difficulty is to get it good, as it then dyes, and is almost incapable of wearing out.

The newest draperies consist of a long piece of stuff twice the length of the skirt. The width is pleated into the about side of the waist, and the folds allowed to fall almost to the hem; then the material is folded over, and the other end pleated into the waist further round. The same process is repeated on the other side, and the pleats meet in the middle behind.

Waist ribbons are mostly worn pointed, and consequently have to be shaped by taking out a deep V, and stitching up firmly. Some sashes are worn so large and of such wide silk, that the skirt is half hidden by them, and they are too conspicuous to be pretty. They are tied on one side, and frequently do instead of any kind of panel or side drapery.

Tan cloth relieved with green, and *vice-versa*, are fashionable, but one had need be able to afford a great many dresses, to wear either tan or pale grey, because they soil so quickly. A great lady recently wore a gown of black velvet with narrow grey satin panels, and the combination is one that would work well with a serviceable velveteen or cashmere. The satin panel should be covered with a black figured net, which not only keeps it from soiling but prevents it from showing spots or discolourations.

We give a very pretty illustration of a dress that is quite smart enough for a quiet evening, and yet not too smart for ordinary wear in fine weather. It shows the easiest as well as the newest way of managing stripes in front drapery, and has a pretty bodice, the centre part of which is best made of a striped silk that harmonises with or matches the material. Half a striped soft silk handkerchief, cut lengthway, answers the purpose very well indeed. The plain bodice meets this vest on both sides, and then a straight piece of the material must be run on all down by each side of the vest with the raw edge turned towards the sleeve. This must then be turned over, and gathered at the top, where it will be set into the neck-band, pulled out a little, kept in place with invisible stitches and arranged on the points of the bodice, and turned under and faced with silk, or corded, which last looks very well. Two vandykes of velvet of the darkest colour in the material, or two bands of the stuff braided put across, as shown in the illustration, make a pretty finish, keep the lower part from showing wear and soil so soon as would otherwise be the case, and can easily be renewed when shabby. The skirt can be made with or without velvet or braided revers, and three or four pleats of silk (for which exactly a width of ordinary silk is wanted), placed on one or both sides according to taste.

Vienna is one of the most dressy capitals in Europe, and in fact Vienna fashions are often considered in advance of Parisian ones. The very latest notion among ladies there is a large apron extending well round the hips, just as a housemaid's morning apron does, and without a bib. It is made of alternate triple folds of black or white surah, and a row of black or white lace insertion as the case may be, hollowed out at the waist, and stitched with very few pleats into quite three-quarters of a yard of a long length of ribbon which ties at one side into a bow and ends. Made in black this will prove very useful to middle-class women, not only preserving the front of a dress, but hiding it when slightly shabby.

All bonnets this season are made close fitting, and very few hats are high crowned. Bonnet strings, too, are quite the order of the day, either inch wide, or about three inches wide. This is very sensible for winter, and saves many a case of swollen glands and earache. Some of the highest class Parisian bonnets are made of velvet, with a band of jet round the edge, and a velvet bow of contrasting colour at the top over the forehead, and extending a little over the outside of the bonnet. A grey velvet with a rose coloured bow, and a dark blue velvet with a ribbon bow and strings of lighter blue are very fashionable, and have the merit of being neat as well as bright.

A great many of the new dresses are combinations of two materials, one plain, and the other bordered so that the border can be torn off the length of the stuff, or made in stripes across it, the former being preferable. Some beautiful cashmeres are also made with silk wraps; they take the place of a silk gown, and are far more suitable for being finished up as everyday garments.

Very neat little sets of collar and cuffs are being made in such close furs as beaver and sealskin. The collars have springs that make them fit closely, and are most useful for driving, and also for taking off on going into a warm room or a church, and for putting on again when coming out. Sealskin is for many purposes set on one side in favour of seal plush cloth, which is a material that wears well, and makes charming and inexpensive jackets and mantles; some ladies, indeed, wear plush in preference to sealskin.